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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000601

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/28/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KMCA](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: MORE REACTIONS TO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

REF: A. BANJUL 594
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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) A well-informed journalist, Pap Saine, portrayed Taiwan and local businessmen of Lebanese origin as key sources of funding for President Jammeh's successful re-election campaign. A Commonwealth Secretariat official and election observer, Prof. Ade Adefuye, asserted that Jammeh's victory "represented the people's will," despite the flawed electoral process, and judged that the 2006 contest was "no worse" than the 2001 poll deemed credible by the international community. By regional African standards, according to Adefuye, the Gambians deserved "higher than average marks" for the conduct of the voting process itself, but "lower than average" marks for the conduct of the preceding phase of the electoral process. Recounting his and Commonwealth delegation head Salim Ahmed Salim's post-election meeting with Jammeh, Adefuye said they had made clear their concern over the slanted playing field in the electoral process. Adefuye made clear his dismay over Jammeh's outrageous statements in a post-election press conference. END SUMMARY.

JOURNALIST'S READOUT

[1](#)2. (C) In September 27 conversation with Ambassador, the well-informed chief editor of the independent daily, "The Point," Pap Saine, expressed surprise at President Jammeh's margin of victory -- 67 percent compared to second-place finisher UDP party head Ousainou Darboe's 27 percent -- in the September 22 contest (see reftels for background). Saying he had expected Jammeh to obtain about 55 percent of the vote, Saine attributed the greater winning margin to an effective and vigorous campaign by Jammeh and his APRC party. Saine observed that, in the last presidential election, in 2001, Jammeh had taken victory for granted and mounted a lackluster re-election campaign; he had been chastened in winning by a relatively narrow margin -- 52 percent of the vote, compared to Darboe's 37 percent. As a result, Saine continued, in this latest contest, the APRC had pulled out the stops to ensure a comfortable victory, freely drawing from state resources for its campaign. He spoke of Taiwan as a key source of those resources, citing Taipei's "campaign contribution" of dols 3.5 million plus another tranche of dols 3 million in assistance earmarked for a crucial voting bloc -- the country's farmers. He added that The Gambia's

business community, particularly those of Lebanese origin, had also made generous contributions to the APRC.

13. (C) Saine described Jammeh as the "credible winner" of the September 22 contest. At the same time, he readily acknowledged the slanted playing field in Jammeh's favor in the September 22 contest, asserting that "thousands" of non-Gambians from Senegal's Casamance region had been fraudulently registered as voters to beef up Jammeh's tally. Saine judged that there had been a similar level of fraudulent voting by non-Gambians in the 2001 contest. He also acknowledged instances of voting, both in 2006 and 2001, by under-age Gambians, but maintained that the extent of such under-age voting was modest on both occasions. Asked for his views on the reduced overall voter turnout in the 2006 poll -- 59 percent -- compared to that of 87 percent recorded in 2001, Saine maintained that the major factor was that numerous opposition supporters refrained from voting out of the belief that, with the schism between the UDP's Darboe and Halifa Sallah of NADD, Jammeh's victory was certain.

COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER'S ASSESSMENT

14. (C) In September 28 discussion with Ambassador, the Commonwealth Secretariat's African Section head, Prof. Ade Adefuye, said the forthcoming Commonwealth team's election observation report would characterize Jammeh's victory as "representing the people's will." It would indicate, he stressed, that the voting process itself went smoothly, that secrecy of the ballot was respected, and that there was no evidence of any systematic rigging of results. At the same time, Adefuye continued, the Commonwealth report would point to the unequal playing field that prevailed during the campaigning phase of the electoral process. He characterized the 2006 election as "no worse" than the 2001 version, while maintaining that, compared to 2001,

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Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) officials performed with greater competence in this latest contest -- although, he readily added, the IEC's capacity and resources remained limited and donor assistance was needed. Asked to judge the credibility of The Gambia's 2006 poll with regional African standards, Adefuye said the Gambians deserved "higher than average" marks for the conduct of the actual voting process, while the conduct of the preceding phase warranted "lower than average" marks because of the unequal playing field.

MEETING WITH JAMMEH

15. (C) Adefuye recounted Commonwealth delegation head (former Tanzanian Prime Minister and OAU Secgen) Salim Ahmed Salim's post-election meeting with President Jammeh. Adefuye, who claimed to know Jammeh well from past visits and private meetings with him here, accompanied Salim to the meeting. Adefuye said the conversation had been frank; he and Salim, while congratulating Jammeh on his victory, had made clear their concern over the slanted playing field and, in particular, the use of state resources in the APRC's campaigning. The Commonwealth reps had also expressed special concern over the partisan pro-APRC demeanor of military and security forces during the campaigning. Adefuye stated that a clearly resentful Jammeh had defended the APRC's electioneering effort. At the same time, Adefuye went on, Jammeh had also agreed that, in the run-up to the next contest -- the January 2007 National Assembly elections -- the APRC would abide by a February 2006 inter-party MOU, drafted by the Commonwealth, that provided for a "code of good conduct" -- e.g., neutrality of state bureaucrats, separation of state and party resources, equal media access -- for parties during the electoral process. Adefuye portrayed Jammeh's professed acceptance of the MOU as a significant gesture, noting its flouting by the APRC during

its just-ended election campaign.

JAMMEH'S PRESS CONFERENCE

16. (C) Adefuye remarked that he had been as dismayed as anyone over some of Jammeh's remarks at his post-election press conference, saying that, as in past discussions with Jammeh, he would continue to urge him to moderate his rhetoric. (NOTE: In his remarks, the erratic Jammeh displayed his penchant for making outrageous statements. Asked about press restrictions in The Gambia, he replied: "Let me tell you one thing. The whole world can go to hell. If I want to ban any newspaper, I will, with good reason." He repeatedly chastized the West for giving Africa short shrift after subjecting it to "400 years of exploitation," stressing the need for African states to rely on themselves for development rather than count on Western donors. He remarked: "My World Bank has always been the almighty Allah and he will always remain my World Bank; I don't look up to anybody but the almighty Allah to develop this country." Asked about his recent overtures to the Iranian and Venezuelan leaders, Jammeh responded that The Gambia is "neutral in superpower politics" and an "independent, sovereign state." END NOTE)

COMMENT

17. (C) In canvassing election observers and others, we note their consensus that the outcome of the 2006 presidential election reflected the "popular will," notwithstanding a flawed electoral process that resulted in an inflated margin of victory for Jammeh. Also, our contacts -- among them, journalist Saine and Commonwealth rep Adefuye -- indicate that this latest contest, despite its assorted shortcomings, was no more flawed than the 2001 event. Losing UDP candidate Darboe, as previously reported (ref a), asserted that the APRC was actually better behaved this time. Looking ahead to the National Assembly elections, it remains to be seen to what extent Jammeh and the APRC will respect the inter-party MOU and permit a more level playing field. However, Jammeh's tough post-election statements, particularly regarding the media, are not encouraging. END COMMENT
STAFFORD